

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LISBON 5152

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, EAGR, PO

SUBJ: SOCIALISTS CHALLENGE COMMUNIST CONTROL IN RURAL ALENTEJO

REF: LISBON 3956 (DTG 141341Z JUL 76)

SUMMARY: RECENT INCIDENTS IN THE RURAL ALENTEJO HIGHLIGHT A NEW SOCIALIST STRATEGY FOR BREAKING COMMUNIST HEGEMONY THERE. CENTRAL TO THIS STRATEGY IS THE FORMATION OF "INDEPENDENT" COOPERATIVES AS SPIN-OFFS FROM PCP- DOMINATED COLLECTIVES. THE COMMUNISTS HAVE REACTED PREDICTABLY WITH THREATS AND ATTEMPTS AT INTIMIDATION. ALTHOUGH THE PCP HAS LOST MOMENTUM IN THE ALENTEJO, IT RETAINS FIRM CONTROL OF THE RURAL UNIONS. SOCIALIST CADRES IN THE ALENTEJO ARE ALREADY STRETCHED THIN, AND THE PS MAY NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT HUMAN OR FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO DO THE JOB. TO THE EXTENT THE SOCIALISTS ARE SUCCESSFUL, THE PCP CAN BE EXPECTED TO INCREASE PRESSURES IN OTHER AREAS. END SUMMARY.

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1. CONFRONTATION IN THE ALENTEJO: RECENT INCIDENTS IN THE DISTRICT OF BEJA HIGHLIGHT THE GROWING STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OF THE RURAL ALENTEJO.

-- IN MID-JULY, AT THE "HERDADE DOS MACHADOS," A STRONG STAND BY PS AGRICULTURE MINISTER LOPES CARDOSO FORCED THE COMMUNIST-DOMINATED BEJA UNION OF RURAL WORKERS TO BACK DOWN (REFTEL). THE PCP UNION HAD SOUGHT THROUGH PRESSURE TACTICS TO FORCE BREAK-AWAY FARMERS TO RETURN TO A PCP-CONTROLLED COLLECTIVE.

-- THE FOLLOWING WEEK, AT THE "FONTE DOS CANTAROS" COLLECTIVE, ALSO IN BEJA, THE PCP AGAIN SOUGHT THROUGH INTIMIDATION TO PREVENT THE FORMATION OF A COOPERATIVE OUTSIDE OF PCP DISCIPLINE.

2. FACTORS COMMON TO THESE AND SIMILAR CASES REPORTED ELSEWHERE IN BEJA AND EVORA HAVE INCLUDED:
(A) THE EXISTENCE OF A GROUP OF RURAL WORKERS DETERMINED TO EXERT ITS INDEPENDENCE FROM PCP-CONTROLLED COLLECTIVES;
(B) UNEQUIVOCAL SUPPORT FOR THE BREAK-AWAY GROUP FROM SOCIALIST MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE LOPES CARDOSO.
(C) STRONG BACKING FOR BOTH THE WORKERS AND THE MINISTRY BY CIVIL AND MILITARY AUTHORITIES AT BOTH LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS.

3. THE SOCIALIST STRATEGY: PERHAPS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ASPECT OF THESE EVENTS IS THAT THEY REFLECT A NEW PS STRATEGY FOR CAPTURING THE INITIATIVE. THE PS OBJECTIVE IS TO BREAK THE CURRENT PCP STRANGLE HOLD IN MUCH OF THE RURAL ALENTEJO. CENTRAL TO THIS STRATEGY IS THE FORMATION OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES AS SPIN-OFFS FROM PCP-DOMINATED COLLECTIVES. RURAL WORKERS, DISSATISFIED FOR IDEOLOGICAL OR OTHER REASONS WITH PCP TUTELAGE, HAVE RECEIVED THE ACTIVE ENCOURAGEMENT OF LOCAL PS CADRES AND THE AUTHORITIES. THEY HAVE LET IT BE KNOWN THAT ANY EFFORT BY RURAL WORKERS TO FORM INDEPENDENT COOPERATIVES WILL BE SUPPORTED AND DEFENDED.

4. THE PS OFFENSIVE: A NUMBER OF FACTORS HAVE CONTRIBUTED
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TO THE NEW PS ASSERTIVENESS IN THE RURAL SECTOR.

-- THE MYTH OF PCP INVINCIBILITY HAS BEEN SHATTERED. THE RECENT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS WERE AN EYE OPENER TO MANY IN THE ALENTEJO. THE RESULTS REVEALED THAT THE PCP WAS NOT AN ORGANIZATIONAL MONOLITH. THEY CONFIRMED THE EXISTENCE OF A LARGE FLOATING CONSTITUENCY ON THE LEFT. THE PS WAS PREPARED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION.

-- THE PS HAS FINALLY ACHIEVED A MEASURE OF CONTROL OVER THE INSTITUTIONAL APPARATUS LIKING THE GOP TO THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR. DESPITE COMMUNIST RESISTANCE, THE SOCIALISTS HAVE BEEN MODESTLY SUCCESSFUL IN ROOTING OUT PCP ACTIVISTS WITHIN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND THE REGIONAL AGRARIAN REFORM CENTERS. MOST OF THE COMMUNISTS IN THE UPPER ECHELONS OF THE CENTERS, INCLUDING SEVERAL DIRECTORS, HAVE BEEN SACKED.

-- THERE HAS BEEN A FULLER REALIZATION OF THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NATION OF CONTINUED PCP DOMINATION OF AGRICULTURAL REFORM. THE SOCIALISTS HAVE BECOME CONVINCED THAT THE GOP HAS BEEN, IN EFFECT, SUBSIDIZING THE PCP THROUGH THE AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAM. THE PS WILL NO LONGER TOLERATE THIS SITUATION.

5. CHANGING TIMES: THE TURN AROUND IN THE ALENTEJO REFLECTS CHANGES IN THE OVERALL POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT. THE POLITICAL PECKING ORDER HAS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY SINCE THE ABORTIVE NOVEMBER 1975 COUP. SYMPATHETIC ATTITUDES, IF NOT OUTRIGHT COMPLICITY BY THE AUTHORITIES IN THE STEADY LEFTWARD MARCH OF A YEAR AGO, NO LONGER PREVAIL. ACTIONS TAKEN IN THE WAKE OF THE NOVEMBER 1975 EVENTS UNDERSCORE THIS POINT.

-- LTC FIGUEIREDO, A CAREER ARMY OFFICER CLOSE TO PRESIDENT EANES, WAS NAMED TO REPLACE A LEFT LEANING MILITARY OFFICER AS BEJA CIVIL GOVERNOR.

-- PRESSURES WERE INCREASED ON SOUTHERN MILITARY REGION COMMANDER BG PEZARAT CORREIA TO PUT AN END TO INDISCIPLINE BOTH WITHIN HIS UNITS AND THE COUNTRYSIDE AT LARGE.

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-- THE APPEARANCE OF ORGANIZED OPPOSITION ON THE RIGHT, IN THE FORM OF THE PORTUGUESE CONFEDERATION OF FARMERS, GAVE PAUSE TO THOSE CONTEMPLATING FURTHER OCCUPATIONS AND INVASIONS OF LAND IN THE ALENTEJO.

-- THE GOVERNMENT IN APRIL SUSPENDED PCP AGRARIAN REFORM STATE SECRETARY VICTOR LOURO PENDING INVESTIGATION OF INFLAMMATORY REMARKS MADE TO RURAL WORKERS IN EVORA. ALTHOUGH LOURO WAS SUBSEQUENTLY REINSTATED, THE MESSAGE WAS CLEAR: IRRESPONSIBLE ACTIONS BY PCP ACTIVISTS ON THE PUBLIC PAYROLL WOULD NO LONGER BE TOLERATED. LOURO WAS REPLACED BY CASTRO GUERRA, A SOCIALIST AND CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF LOPES CARDOSO WHEN THE SOARES GOVERNMENT WAS FORMED.

-- COMMUNIST-BACKED EFFORTS TO DISRUPT THE EANES PRESIDENTIAL

CAMPAIGN WERE MET FRONTALLY BY THE AUTHORITIES. CLASHES IN

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THE WAKE OF THE EANES CAMPAIGN LEFT ONE DEAD AND A SCORE
INJURED AND HIGHLIGHTED THE POINT THAT THE ALENTEJO WOULD
NO LONGER BE CONSIDERED AS AN EXCLUSIVE PRESERVE OF
THE PCP.

-- THE OCCUPATION OF MOST OF THE BEST LAND IN THE ALENTEJO
BY THE END OF 1975 ALSO CONTRIBUTED TO A LOSS OF MOMENTUM
BY THE PCP.

6. PCP RESPONDS AGGRESSIVELY: THE PCP HAS REACTED
PREDICTABLY TO THE CHALLENGE TO ITS HEGEMONY. ITS RESPONSE
HAS TAKEN THE FORM OF:

-- PHYSICAL INTIMIDATION;

-- THREATS OF RETALIATION, INCLUDING DENIAL OF EMPLOYMENT;

-- MORE PCP-SPONSORED RALLIES TO KEEP SPIRITS UP IN THE
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FACE OF ADVERSITY;

-- FLYING SQUADS OF PCP ACTIVISTS DISPATCHED TO "SOFT SPOTS"
THREATENED BY DEFECTIONS OF SOCIALIST-LED INCURSIONS.

7. THESE ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN BUTTRESSED BY A VIRTUAL
AVALANCHE OF PCP-GENERATED PRO-AGRARIAN-REFORM PROPAGANDA.
THE PAGES OF PARTY ORGANS "AVANTE" AND "O DIARIO" HAVE BEEN
FILLED WITH COMMUNIST THREATS AND EXHORTATIONS. "NO
AGRICULTURE REFORM IS POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE PCP" IS THE NEW
COROLLARY TO THE PCP DOGMA OF "NO GOVERNMENT OF THE LEFT
WITHOUT THE PCP." CUNHAL, HIMSELF, HAS LED THE PCP CHORUS.
SPEAKING LAST WEEK TO ASSEMBLED PARTY MEMBERS BELONGING
TO COOPERATIVES AND COLLECTIVE FARMS, HE CLAIMED THAT AGRARIAN
REFORM WAS A "REVOLUTIONARY CONQUEST" WHICH MUST BE DEFENDED
AT ALL COSTS.

8. UPHILL STRUGGLE REMAINS: DESPITE RECENT REVERSES, THE
COMMUNISTS RETAIN SIGNIFICANT ASSETS IN THE ALENTEJO.
TO AN IMPORTANT EXTENT THEY HAVE SUCCESSFULLY IDENTIFIED
THEMSELVES WITH AGRARIAN REFORM; THEY STILL CONTROL THE
RURAL UNIONS. AS PRESSURES AGAINST THEM HAVE INCREASED,
THE COMMUNISTS HAVE CONCENTRATED GREATER EFFORTS ON THEIR
INTERNAL ORGANIZATION. THE DEFECTION OF SOME OF THEIR LESS
SURE FOLLOWERS MAY ACTUALLY HAVE INCREASED THE COHESIVENESS
OF THE PARTY IN THE ALENTEJO.

9. UNANSWERED QUESTIONS REMAIN:

-- TO WHAT EXTENT WILL THE PCP ACCEPT REVERSES IN THE
AGRICULTURE SECTOR WITHOUT UPPING THE STAKES? TO THE EXTENT
THE SOCIALISTS ARE SUCCESSFUL IN THEIR EFFORTS TO SUPPLANT
THE PCP, THE COMMUNISTS CAN BE EXPECTED TO INCREASE PRESSURES
IN OTHER AREAS, FOR EXAMPLE, BY PROMOTING LABOR STRIFE IN THE
LISBON INDUSTRIAL BELT;

-- THERE IS A REAL QUESTION WHETHER THE PS GOVERNMENT HAS
THE CAPABILITY TO DO THE JOB. PS CADRES IN THE ALENTEJO
ARE ALREADY STRETCHED THIN, THE PS HAS YET TO GAIN FULL
CONTROL OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE APPARATUS OF GOVERNMENT IN
THE AGRICULTURE FIELD.

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